

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 19

NEW YORK POST
22 July 1985

INSIDE WASHINGTON



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Smoothing the way to summit

PRESIDENT Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev are going out of their way to improve the political atmosphere between the superpowers before their November summit meeting.

No major breakthroughs are seen on either arms control or the thorny "regional problems" that always threaten the superpowers' relationship — but there has been a noticeable thaw in recent weeks.

According to foreign policy experts, both leaders have a lot riding on a successful meeting, and clearly are trying not to rock the boat in advance of the first summit between U.S. and Soviet leaders since 1979.

Evidence that Gorbachev is seeking a better climate in advance of the meeting was seen earlier this month, when U.S., French and Israeli intelligence agencies got confirmation that the new Soviet leader played a major role in securing the release of the American hostages from TWA Flight 847.

Intelligence reports reaching the CIA conclude that Gorbachev, in his meeting with Hafez Assad in Moscow on June 18-22, virtually ordered the Syrian leader to intervene in the crisis.

Gorbachev's motivation, according to the CIA analysis, was that he wanted to avoid U.S. military intervention in Lebanon as well as create a "favorable" impression in advance of the then-unannounced summit.

Gorbachev, clearly trying to alter the Soviet image in the West, also sent Reagan a rare get-well message while he was at Bethesda Naval Hospital — a move that got considerable attention.

Reagan, in the past few weeks, has been equally conciliatory toward Moscow.

Last week, when a Soviet military personnel carrier rammed a U.S. Army truck in East Germany as part of the never-ending war of nerves over the Berlin Wall, the administration had an opportunity to "stage" a massive propaganda campaign against the Kremlin.

But the President, still in the hospital, did not even discuss the incident with his advisers.

There was brief mention of it in Reagan's daily intelligence summary on Wednesday and Soviet diplomats were called into the State Dept. for a dressing down — but without the kind of publicity that has been generated in the past.

The administration's response last week to the end of the second round of arms talks in Geneva was equally devoid of harsh criticism of the Kremlin.

Despite the Soviets' intransigence on all three categories of negotiation, Reagan's arms-control czars — Max Kampelman and National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane — chose to focus on new "conceptual" changes in the Soviet position and to express hope for major progress in the next round.

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